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“Let us unite, therefore, in imploring the Supreme Ruler of nations, to spread his holy protection over these United States; to turn the machinations of the wicked to the confirming of our constitutions; to enable us at all times to root out internal sedition, and put invasion to flight; to perpetuate to our country that prosperity, which his goodness has already conferred, and to verify the anticipation of this government being a safeguard to human rights.”

President George Washington, 1794

Race to the Top Winners Announced

Secretary of Education Arne Duncan this week [announced the winners](#) for phase two of the Race to the Top (RTTT) program. RTTT was designed to award states for making dramatic changes in their education programs. These changes include “Adopting standards and assessments that prepare students to succeed in college and the workplace; Building data systems that measure student growth and success, and inform teachers and principals how to improve instruction; Recruiting, developing, rewarding, and retaining effective teachers and principals, especially where they are needed most; and Turning around their lowest-performing schools.”

The District of Columbia, Florida, Georgia, Hawaii, Maryland, Massachusetts, New York, North Carolina, Ohio, and Rhode Island were all winners in the second phase of the program. They join Delaware and Tennessee, the first round winners, in the “Obama Administration’s groundbreaking education reform program that will directly impact 13.6 million students, and 980,000 teachers in 25,000 schools,” according to the Department of Education.

Announcing the winners, Secretary Duncan stated, “These states show what is possible when adults come together to do the right thing for children. Every state that applied showed a tremendous amount of leadership and a bold commitment to education reform. The creativity and innovation in each of these applications is breathtaking. We set a high bar and these states met the challenge.”

According to a DOE press release, “the \$4.35 billion Race to the Top Fund is an unprecedented federal investment in reform. The program includes \$4 billion for statewide reform grants and \$350 million to support states working together to improve the quality of their assessments, which the Department plans to award in September.” The support for states working together could include the adoption of the Common Core Standards or national standards.

In fact, Secretary Duncan praised states that have adopted the Common Core Standards. While supporters of the [Common Core Standards](#) have adamantly stated that the initiative has been state-led and is not a move toward a national or federal standard, the Department of Education and the Administration’s role in incentivizing states to sign on and adopt the standards is pervasive. In order to be a highly considered candidate to receive RTTT funds, states must submit “[evidence of having adopted common standards](#).” In a letter sent by the secretary to the governors of those states that were named as finalists in the Race to the Top Funding program, the Secretary Duncan stated, “The Department pledges to support you and your state in this work by

sharing the lessons learned and the materials developed through Race to the Top, and by including you in relevant collaborative learning communities. In addition, as you are aware, President Obama has proposed \$1.35 billion for Race to the Top in his fiscal year 2011 budget. We hope to continue this program and its support of reform across the country.”

Judge Blocks Tax-Payer Funded Embryonic Stem-Cell Research

The District Court of Appeals in the District of Columbia issued a [temporary injunction](#), essentially blocking the Obama Administration’s attempts to use federal funds to support embryonic stem cell research. The lawsuit was brought by adult stem cell researchers. They argued that the National Institutes of Health guidelines issued last year violated federal law because they allowed federal funding to be used to conduct research on embryonic stem cell lines that had already been created. The evidence used to support their argument included the Dickey-Wicker Amendment which was attached to the annual Health and Human Services appropriations bills in 1996. The amendment prohibited federal funding for “research in which a human embryo or embryos are destroyed, discarded, or knowingly subjected to risk of injury or death.” In 2001 the Bush Administration created a policy which allowed research on embryonic stem cells created prior to 2001. However, President Obama lifted the restrictions on embryonic stem cells created after 2001 and allowed the NIH to establish guidelines to use these embryonic stem cells. The NIH found a compromise and deemed “those old stem cell lines eligible for government research dollars if scientists can prove they met the spirit of the new ethics standards.”

U.S. District Judge Royce Lamberth ruled that “despite attempts to separate the derivation of human embryonic stem cells from the research process, ‘the two cannot be separated’ because culling those stem cells destroys an embryo.” He wrote, “The guidelines violate that prohibition by allowing federal funding of ESC research because ESC research depends upon the destruction of a human embryo.”

Pro-Life Movement on Fire in the States

While the abortion debate seems to be fading from the national platform, several states have taken on the fight to protect the unborn. Alaska made history this past week after [voters passed a parental notification law](#), mandating a minor notify her parents before an abortion is administered. This marked the first time in history a parental notification law was passed by voters and not by the state’s legislature. The measure passed with 55% of the vote.

Alaska is not the only state turning to voters rather than its legislature to ensure protections for life. Colorado has also begun a massive campaign to urge voters to support a personhood amendment to the state’s constitution. The amendment defines a “person” as any human being beginning at conception through natural death. In order to garner support, a website dedicated to the ballot initiative [MyCampaignTracker.org](#) was created and [designed](#) to “encourage the grassroots personhood movement in Colorado” and “to reach local communities across our state with our campaign message of ‘Persons not Property,’ through November’s election.” The campaign has seen overwhelming support from pro-lifers in the state as well as from many candidates seeking election.

South Carolina and Virginia have also been supportive of the pro-life movement. South Carolina Governor Mark Sanford signed into law H3245, a bill that [would require](#) a 24-hour waiting period for a woman seeking an abortion and would require that the doctor offer the woman an opportunity to look at an ultrasound of the child before an abortion. In Virginia, Attorney General Ken Cuccinelli stated this week that abortion clinics will now be legally regulated just as any other medical establishment. [Brian J. Gottstein](#), a spokesman for [Mr. Cuccinelli](#) stated, “The state has long regulated outpatient surgical facilities and personnel to ensure a certain level of protection for patients. There is no reason to hold facilities providing abortion services to any lesser standard for their patients. Even pharmacies, funeral homes and veterinary clinics are regulated by the state.”

While the economy and jobs have dominated the federal debate, the pro-life movement continues to gain support among constituents at the state level, winning major victories throughout the nation.

Religious Hiring Victory

The 9th Circuit Court of Appeals handed down a huge [victory](#) for religious hiring rights advocates this week, when the court decided 2-1 that World Vision, which performs humanitarian work, is indeed a religious organization. Several workers who had been fired by the Christian outreach group because they no longer adhered to the organization's doctrinal beliefs brought the case before a U.S. District Court claiming the group was not a religious organization. The Court ruled in favor of World Vision, and the workers appealed to the 9th Circuit.

Both Courts [ruled](#) that in order to be entitled to the religious hiring exemption of Title VII of the 1964 Civil Rights Act, the institution does not necessarily need to be a church or under the jurisdiction of a church. Rather the opinion stated a religious organization may qualify if the organization is "organized for a self-identified, religious purpose" as stated in its mission statement and is "engaged in activity consistent with, and in furtherance of" its religious decree and "holds itself out to the public as religious."

The Court also expressed that the organization does not need to "confine" to "worship-like" services and activities in order to be considered a religious institution but can serve the "secular" needs of the community and other individuals.

In Case You Missed It:

[Weekly Market Update](#) provided by Jeff Beach of the [AACCS Investment Team at Merrill Lynch](#)

[Groups Urge Congress to Afford Religious Hiring Rights](#)

[National Religious Broadcasters Warn of ENDA's "Chilling" Effect](#)



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